

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

What is a Sustainable Community?

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People live in different types of communities. Family and group of friends, the village or city we live in, the church we belong to or the sports and cultural associations where we spend our free time are all forms of human communities. Within them, we share physical spaces, social values or common interests with others.

An important form of human communities are territorial ones: the neighbourhood, district, village or city where we live. Each country has specific ways of organising these communities locally and regionally, defined by legal and administrative rules. For example, each territorial administrative unit (commune/village or municipality/city) has its own management, with powers and responsibilities clearly established by law.

Nowadays, there is increasing emphasis on the quality of living in these territorial communities. Through public policies, democratic countries seek to continuously improve public services and the quality of life in local communities. More recently, the concern to develop these human communities is aimed at achieving sustainable communities that provide the best possible long-term living conditions for their inhabitants, while protecting the natural environment and social values, enabling not only current generations but also future generations to enjoy a quality life.

Characteristics of a sustainable community

Flint (2013) shows that a sustainable community can be described by the following dimensions:

- *Economic* security: a healthy and diversified economy, able to adapt to change, providing economic security for its inhabitants, taking into account the limitations imposed by the ecological and social environment and promoting quality rather than quantity.
- *Societal* well-being: recognising and supporting human needs for well-being, community belonging, connection to place and connection to nature, together with the provision of goods and services that help meet these needs and respect the integrity of the natural environment.
- *Ecological* integrity: the natural environment and other ecological systems are maintained and conserved in order to protect their natural functions, their beauty, their recreational function and their capacity to provide natural resources.
- *Cultural* vitality: preservation of cultural heritage as a necessary element for promoting cultural values, knowledge of history and supporting social learning processes across generations.
- *Civic* engagement and responsibility: empowering community members to take social responsibility, creating shared vision, equity and the skills needed for participatory governance.
- *Institutional* effectiveness: transparent and effective public administration, active non-profit organisations, community leaders and initiative groups with influence to support sustainable development principles and policies. At this point, Warren Flint points out that: "One of our biggest challenges is raising the level of understanding public officials and citizens have for the principles and practices of sustainability. If decision-makers are expected to embrace sustainable economic development and promote this philosophy as a long-

term policy in support of activities such as tourism that rely on quality natural environments, these officials must have a set of guiding principles upon which they rely in making decisions and implementing sustainability policy" (Flint, 2013, pp. 59-60).

In order to build such communities, Flint stresses the importance of collective participation: "To achieve such conditions, *all* people must be allowed and encouraged to participate in guiding the process of sustainable community development" (Flint, 2013, p. 17).

Linking social and economic aspects with environmental quality, with a view to harmonious development in a sustainable manner, requires approaches at different spatial levels (Moser, 2009, Perniu et al., 2020) differentiated, beyond the geographical scale, by the individual-environment relationship, through the way in which polluting, corrective or preventive actions are undertaken in relation to environmental quality:

- *micro* level - the individual level, that of the home as a private space where real actions are guided by individual decisions. This level is divided (Ygicantlar et al., 2015) into *sub-micro* - that of the individual dwelling, and *micro* - as the level of the plot, as the minimum territorial unit;
- *meso* level - the level of a community (neighbourhood, quarter), involves the use of proximity spaces and spaces open to the public. It is the level at which various actions (with a negative/positive impact on the environment) are carried out, which can be understood as a combination of actions implementing the strategies established at the higher level with actions coming from members of the community (as individuals or as organised groups);
- *macro* level - this is the level at which the administrative-territorial units (city/state/region/state) are placed and at which development policies and strategies are formulated and implemented. The level is divided (Ygicantlar et al., 2015) into *macro* (city/region) and super-macro (state);
- *global* level - this is the level that encompasses the population and the ecosphere as a whole, the level at which environmental issues are considered from the perspective of sustainable *global*, social and economic development.

In its relationship with the socio-economic system, at different levels, the environment offers opportunities (through the resources it provides) and constraints (due to lack of resources or alterations in their quality). As the balance between opportunities and constraints is severely affected, there are many concerns both in formulating and implementing development policies and strategies and in identifying and implementing technical solutions to ameliorate the imbalance.

References

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